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DURING the forty years that I have been a member of the Chicago Literary Club, never, except on the most imperative necessity, have I refused to respond to a demand made by its exercise committee on my limited powers of expression. Therefore, when one of those entrusted with the task of furnishing essayists for this year asked me last summer for a paper during the coming winter, I assented, involuntarily reflecting as I did so on the uncertainty of human life, and half wondering whether at my age a moral debt of this kind, payable so many months away, was not a most uncertain obligation. I was not prepared, however, for the suggestion which came pat upon my promise and my thought. "I have a subject for you," said the suave committeeman. I was startled.

"A subject! What may it be?"

"Old Age."

"But everything has been said about old age that can possibly be said," I protested. Every man who has grown old since Methuselah has thought of old age. Old men are garrulous, and most of them therefore have told their thoughts, and although Methuselah probably never wrote essays about it, very many old men since his time have done so. And there is one immortal little book by Cicero, which he called "O Tite," and which we know as "De Senectute," which, though written almost two thousand years ago, may be figuratively called the last word on the subject. It is an impossible theme you have chosen for me. Let me, as heretofore, choose my own."

"Certainly," said my ever courteous but persistent friend. "Certainly, if you wish; but I earnestly press the one I have named on your attention. Cicero by no means has said the last word on it. We want to hear what *you* can say about old age, and you will oblige us much by making it possible. But if you prefer another theme, by all means name it."

Conscience makes cowards of us all. If I had had in my mind at the moment any other subject of which I knew something that I felt would instruct or even amuse you, I should have certainly had the moral cour-

age to repudiate the idea suggested to me, and to announce with firmness that other title for my paper. I had none. My mind for the nonce was a blank. The startling suggestion that I could add anything worth your hearing to Cicero's wonderful essay quite drove out of my mind even a thought I had been in past years cherishing, of telling you some day the true story of a Salem sailor boy who became a Chinese god, and I was speechless.

Still, I think I should have had resolution enough to reject the suggestion made, if a more serious question of conscience had not intervened. Not only did I have no other preferred topic in my mind, but in my remark about Cicero and his little book I had falsified my real thought. Quite convincing as that essay was to me when I read it as a schoolboy, I was very conscious that in a recent rereading I had found it to the last degree unconvincing, an almost unadulterated panegyric on the advantages of old age which needed much toning down to be even plausible. And I knew in my heart that the "last word" on old age has not yet been spoken and never can be spoken so long as there is youth left in the world to dread old age or old age left to regret lost youth.

So, ashamed at once of my vacuity of mind and my insincerity of speech, I bowed my head and will in assent.

"As you please then," said I. "On your own head be it. Put me down for the subject you, not I, have chosen."

And so it came about that I was forced to think what I could say and how I could say it, "De Senectute."

By one of those flashes of memory which seem like fantastic tricks of the human mind I recalled what I had forgotten, even in my last reading of *De Senectute*, that, as convincing as I thought it in my early teens, I had discovered with something of a shock a little later in my academic course, when introduced to Cicero's delightful and familiar letters, that writing within a year afterward to the same Atticus to whom he had dedicated and sent his book, Cicero said "Amariorem me senectus facit. Stomachor omnia." "Old age makes me more ill-natured. I fret at everything." His optimism in his essay about growing old was either a literary affectation or his mood was transitory. Then it occurred to me that probably *nobody* ever really succeeded in convincing the aged of the advantages of old age or the poor of the advantages of poverty. It is only the young and the well to do who are respectively enthusiastic converts. If an old man is contented with old age or a poor man with poverty he has reasoned *himself* into his belief: no other man has convinced him.

I concluded that, if Cicero's eulogium on old age was merely a literary *tour de force*, a piece of special pleading, its art was not perfect. Perhaps Cato is made to speak when old as he would have spoken only, if at all, when young, and hence the unconvincingness. My fancy took a new turn. What would Cicero have made of it had he portrayed Cato not in his old age but in his youth, an ambitious, bright, philosophically minded fellow, talking not to young friends but to elderly ones just passing off the stage which he was entering? What would those friends have said to his panegyrics on old age? They would undoubtedly have taken a more material part in the conversation than Cicero has allowed to Scipio and Laelius. In this dialogue on Old Age they together said barely two hundred words to Cato's eight thousand. Their grandfathers would certainly have compelled a younger Cato, however oracular and didactic he tried to be, to listen as well as to talk when in their company. But *what* would they have said? Something we might hope less obvious than the only interruptions to Cato's flow of talk which Cicero's Scipio and Laelius were allowed by him to make, that perhaps wealth and preferment made old age, which other men found so unwelcome, easier for the speaker to bear.

Once entertained, the idea was rather a

fascinating one to me. It suggested by analogy that queer feeling one has in seeing among family portraits a blooming girl who is the mother of one pictured as an aged matron. "What a rum thing time is," says one of Dickens's characters. To me there is an undeniable pathos in anything that brings strongly home the flight of time and its effects. A visit to one's native place to find one's schoolday sweethearts wrinkled widows and one's boy friends of the swimming-pool aged and rheumatic cripples is rather worse on the nerves, I think, than to come upon their tombstones, although that is bad enough. And how a pet dog's progress from winning puppydom through mischievous, frisky youth, vigorous maturity and sedate dignity, to whining, appealing helplessness, tears at last the heartstrings of a genuine dog-lover! And how it seems to him an epitome of his own life, past, present and to come! I have had several such life dramas of the canine world pass before my eyes in my household. I am too old myself now to invite into my experience the pathos of another. But this is all by the way. Why, I mused, should I not imagine a dialogue between a youthful Cato, and an aged Scipio and Laelius? But another thought struck me. Did my friend of the committee have an idea analogous, but different, too, to mine? In pressing so

earnestly his suggestion on me after I had declared that Cicero had exhausted the subject, was he thinking that Cato was not the average old man, and certainly not the right man, in his wealth, in his pride of place, in his conceit of exceptional physical and mental vigor at a very advanced age, and in his hard, vindictive, narrow view of men and manners, to lecture on the relative advantages of youth and age any more than Scipio and Laelius were proper foils or antagonists for his panegyrics? Was *he* thinking also that Cato was too old? That it was a man growing old rather than one on whom old age had already set its seal that could best discourse of it? That could not be after all, I reflected, for my friend must have realized that it is not Cato at all but Cicero who really speaks in the *De Senectute* and that Cicero was but sixty-two when he wrote it, just the age, if I may have an opinion, when the shadows noticeably begin to deepen, but not yet the twilight of life. Would not the best discussion of old age, however, take in a man elderly, passing through the closing years of his maturity, and an old man who no longer denies the fact to himself or others, and a youth with his life career before him? Why not write a new colloquy *De Senectute* and let Laelius be old, Scipio elderly, Cato young? And all average rather than extraordinary men?

The dialogue form, too, I thought, with a feeling of pleasure, will serve at least the purpose for which the hackneyed aphorism says language was given us. It will conceal *my* thoughts. My Cato, Scipo and Laelius shall differ among themselves about the advantages and disadvantages of old age, and my fellow club members may criticize their arugments as they will, but they can neither say that I am sentimental and fallacious, or that I am bitter and cynical, nor that I am resigned and philosophical, in the closing years of my life. Of the arguments of my Cato, Scipio and Laelius, arguments that will be by no means original (for who could be original on a subject discussed by myriads of people through all the centuries?), let the hearers judge without imputing to me their weaknesses!

So I set to work the machinery of my none too facile imagination, so creaky and rumbling in its joints from natural inaptness and long disuse that you might almost hear it working in my head, and projected on a screen before my inner eyes a corner of the clubroom in which we sit to-night, a corner near the fireplace. The fireplace itself, with a mighty effort, I imagine filled with flaming fagots. The desolating sirocco from the radiators is shut off. The time is late on a Monday afternoon of a winter day. By the fire are three cheerful looking men.

Our Cato is but a few years out of his teens and the Harvard Law School, Scipio is a man of sixty with his hair and moustache whitening and suspicious wrinkles beginning to appear about the corners of his eyes. What shall his profession be? It matters not,—a physician, specializing as is the fashion now; prosperous and fairly well to do, we'll say. Laelius is a retired business man well along in the seventies, but whose eye is clear and bright, whose voice and manner show that, as the current saying goes, he bears his age extremely well.

CATO (*loquitur*):

I feel very "chesty" about my election to this club. I have heard about it more or less all my life, and jumped at the chance of joining it. There is nothing I like so well as the society and talk of older men. One learns a lot from them that he ought to know. I hardly know why I was invited, though. You haven't many young men, have you?

SCIPIO (*evidently not quite in good humor, poking the fire vigorously*):

No. More's the pity. Heaven knows we need you and some more like you, if this club is to be kept alive! We are getting to look like a collection of fossil remains in an archeological museum. If I were on the

committee on officers and members I'd advertise for applicants under thirty, if I couldn't get them in any other way. They must suppose this is a sort of Tontine affair, where the diminishing circle will come at last to one old man writing a memorial over the last member but one recently dead.

LAELIUS:

What's the matter with you, Scipio? Don't be sarcastic. You needn't be so pessimistic about the prospects of the Club either. We have two or three new members this year who are young men, besides Cato here.

SCIPIO:

Two or three! Have we, indeed? Well, they won't come here very often, unless we get more. Laelius, it's no use to suppose that we old fogies are so attractive that young people pine for our society. They don't. They want their own kind for associates, and they are right.

LAELIUS:

But you just heard Cato say that he liked the society of old men best.

SCIPIO:

Humph! Yes; I heard him! What is the paper to-night?

CATO:

Dr. Reed is going to give us a paper on "A Trail in the Hudson Bay Country." I was up there in his party last summer and we had a glorious time. He told me then he was going to write up some of our experiences for this club and promised to put in my application so that I should be a member in time to hear them.

SCIPIO:

The Doctor was canny. *He* realized how much we need young men and how difficult it is to get the right sort to join us age-withered creatures. He might have invited you to hear his paper without putting in your application, if he had wished. But he is one of the comparatively young men in the club and he wanted more. More power to his elbow! I am glad you accepted his suggestion to become a member, although I wonder at it. You are sure of a delightful paper to-night, and after all you won't have to come when you don't want to hear any of us pitiable antiques. We can't, like Reed, write of anything really worth while, because we are too old and rheumatic and crippled in one way or another ever to get to Mother Earth and enjoy her again except as a final resting place.

CATO:

Nonsense, Doctor. I'd have risked your

enjoying yourself if you had been with us. You ought to come next summer. I am going nearly to the same place next year, deer hunting and salmon fishing. Come along!

SCIPIO:

No, my boy, I'll be no kill-joy. You lads together are suited to each other and to such a trip. Grandfather-Sit-by-the-Fire here, and I, will stay in the chimney corner and attend to our knitting.

LAELIUS:

Well, I am rather too old even if you asked me, but I'd go in a minute if I were Scipio here and had the chance. He is too avaricious, I think—doesn't want to leave his practice and that sort of thing. That's the worst indication of age I see about him.

CATO:

But I want to ask about that persistent suggestion of yours that old men are not agreeable to young ones, and that old age is a calamity and a burden. We won't make it a personal matter, for I refuse to consider either of you two gentlemen old. But, abstractly and generally, I feel sure you are wrong. I have told you that I prefer the society of older men, and although you pretend not to believe me, I assure you it is true. As for old age being a burden or a

calamity, I have been rereading that charming essay of Cicero, *De Senectute*, lately, that I may not entirely forget my Latin, and, on my word, it's so well reasoned and convincing that, to quote Montaigne, "Il donne l' appetit de veiller." It gave me an appetite for old age. You will excuse my pronunciation of French. It is no worse than Montaigne's spelling of it. He spelt French as badly as Chaucer spelt English.

SCIPIO (*who has been looking at Cato and listening, in apparent astonishment, drops the poker and speaks*):

Do you hear that boy, Laelius? Cato, you amaze me! When I heard you arguing that case the other day where you called me as an expert, I said to myself, "That young man is a good reasoner—a born logician." He'll make his way in his profession. And now you say that the stuff of Cicero in *De Senectute* is convincing! If I thought you were really in earnest I should have to revise my opinion of you as a judge of argument and logic. "Convincing" is just exactly what it isn't. It never convinced anybody. People under thirty, who talk and think about old age with as much detachment as I might talk and think in Chicago, in a remarkably healthy season, of the epidemic of yellow fever in Norfolk when I was a boy, and who only think they are thinking, might be expected

perhaps to say, without believing it, that it is "convincing"—but not you! I pass Montaigne by. I don't know anything particularly about him. He *may* have been a liar. But you yourself are *certainly* insincere and I will convict you of that and acquit you of the astonishing weakness of intellect which your expressed judgment of Cicero's argument would indicate. You said you refused to consider Laelius here, or myself, old. Now, we *are* old, and you know it, and if you didn't think that it was an unpleasant thing to be old, if Cicero had convinced you, as you say, you wouldn't have thought it necessary to indulge in that polite fiction. Cicero couldn't have convinced you. He didn't convince himself. He was whistling as he came near the graveyard, that's all.

LAELIUS:

Come, come, Scipio! You are quite as much off the track about old age as Cato, here, or Cicero's Cato was. If our friend is too young properly to appreciate the exact value of Cicero's reasoning, you are not old enough. I have been in your frame of mind in my time, but I have long been over it. You are feeling like a man who has become conscious that a boat, in which he has been drifting rather slowly and dreamily down a quietly flowing river, has got into a swift current and is without oars. It is going to

the rapids. You are catching at each birthday, as he would catch at overhanging tree branches, trying to stop the boat and missing them all. Isn't that so?

SCIPIO:

Yes—and don't you do the same?

LAELIUS:

No, I am past all that. I recognize the swiftness of the movement as much as you do, and as I believe all people who are growing old do, but I am not fearing any rapids. I feel rather like a traveler in a swift railway train, approaching its destination. *My* birthdays seem to me like the rapid succession of way stations, and I am expecting the final stop at any moment, and the cry of the conductor, "All out! Don't forget your packages and your umbrellas!"

CATO:

I was sure that Laelius would take Cicero's view, rather than yours, Scipio. That is what Cicero makes Cato say in *De Senectute*: "The nearer I approach to death, I see it as a harbor into which I am about to come after a long voyage."

But I wish you would treat my ideas about old age and about Cicero's essay seriously. I was in earnest when I called it convincing, as disparaging to my intellect as you think such a judgment to be, Scipio. Since you

think my harmless compliment to the intellectual and physical vigor of both you gentlemen, inconsistent with my expressed opinion about the advantages of old age, I will withdraw it. I will assume that Laelius may be properly called old and that you, Scipio, may be said to be *growing* old, and *then*, I am prepared to contend that you are each really at an enjoyable period of life, — as enjoyable, if you would but recognize it, as any other. And I think that Cicero undertook to prove that and succeeded. Laelius agrees with me, do you not?

LAELIUS:

No, Cato, I can't say that. Old age, in my view, has compensations rather than advantages. Nature, or nature's God, as I prefer to put it, has in various ways made it more tolerable to bear, than Scipio, upon whom it is just casting its shadow, is willing to admit. It has lights as well as shades. But Cicero has made a rather sophistical argument of his *De Senectute*. Charming it is, as you call it. Its style is Cicero at his best, cheerful and yet serious, fervid and yet calm. It has manly thoughts, brave words, and bright illustration, but I fear that I must agree with Scipio: it is unconvincing in its logic.

SCIPIO:

And I will agree, with some little reservation, on your praise of its style. I love my

Cicero as well as our young friend can, but it always makes me "grouchy," especially when I am feeling some rheumatic effects of my advancing years as I do to-night, to hear old age commended as a blessing. And compliments from a young man on my alleged youthful appearance and manner affect me as compliments on his well-fed appearance might a sailor on a raft in mid-ocean with a rapidly diminishing supply of provisions. I am no worse than Cicero himself in this. He told Atticus, shortly after writing this book in praise of old age, rhetorically so good and logically so poor, that old age gave *him* a grouch and made him kick at everything.

But as Cato withdraws the fallacious compliment and insists that he is serious in his praise of old age, and you think I am too pessimistic in my view of it, and that it has its real compensations, I should like nothing better than to hear what may be said in that behalf. As for myself, I have often tried to think and have always come to the conclusion of the gravedigger in Hamlet: "Mass, I cannot tell."

Cato here says, Laelius, that we are at most enjoyable periods of life. I agree, on the contrary, with George Borrow, who says, "Youth is the only season for enjoyment, and the first twenty-five years of one's life are worth all the rest of the longest life of man,

even though those five and twenty be spent in penury and contempt and the rest in possession of wealth, honors, and respectability; aye, and many of them in strength and health!"

CATO:

When Borrow wrote that, he was a soured and disappointed man. It was his environment that had changed and made him look on life with such a different temperament. He had let Isopel Berners escape him, and taken up with the notable housewife who made good puddings and treacle posset and with that abominable stepdaughter who wouldn't admit on his tombstone that he wrote Lavengro.

But take Cato the Censor, as Cicero represents him in *De Senectute*, and as we know that he really was: He could have said no such thing. Taking a lively interest in all the statecraft of his time, discharging manifold civil duties, intellectually active in literature as well as in politics, belonging, like us, to clubs, banqueting in moderation, enjoying the respect and receiving the attentions of his friends and clients, diligent in the care of his farm and in all husbandry, cheerful, even innocently gay, looking forward to blissful immortality, or at the very worst to the peace of annihilation, he was at eighty-four certainly as well situated for

happiness as he was when toiling as a soldier in the Second Punic War.

SCIPIO:

You have forged a weapon to my hand in this argument. You attacked my soul's friend Borrow as no fit man to talk of the effects of old age because, as you chose to believe, he had been unfortunate. I deny it, but let that go. Was Cato, rich, of uncommonly strong physique, entrenched in power and popularity among those who counted for most, and loving the fights that his arrogant disposition kept him in, an average octogenarian? Was he the proper man to describe the cruel burdens of old age from his experience, or want of it? If you hope for any such old age as his, the hope must come from that bouyancy of youth which I am envying you. I can hope for none such myself. Our friend Laelius here even is no fair example. He isn't exactly a Cato Major, but although old, he is vigorous and active and in easy circumstances. Most old men are not. Cato's talk about what old men could do in the way of temperate feasts and agricultural pursuits, and so forth, applied no more to his contemporaries than to Laelius and myself. Perhaps not so much. *We* should have a warm room to thaw out in after being chilled in the fields, but with all that, a half-day's work

in a vineyard or a cornfield would probably lay either of *us* up. As for the suppers that Cato calls "small and early." Well——! Why, Laelius, even the modest table-de-hôte before our club meetings you generally shun. What would Cato have thought of *you?* The whole keynote of Cato's contention is not, as Cicero would have you think, that old age is pleasant, but that it is intolerable and should be resisted, and that all its natural weaknesses should be ignored and overcome, which by the way is quite impossible, though a thousand Catos and Ciceros should so advise.

LAELIUS:

I think you are right about Cato's logic. It isn't logical exactly to try to dissipate the supposed terrors of old age by saying that you must resist it by the exertion of those very qualities it inevitably destroys.

SCIPIO:

Certainly, I am right!

If Cato really had the optimism Cicero attributes to him about old age, it probably came from the wine he drank and that his admirable physique enabled him to carry without harm. It would probably kill any one of us, that heady Falernian, in the quantities in which he drank it.

For I will give you, Cato, a Roland for your Oliver. You attacked my friend

Borrow. I am going to tell you what I think of your friend Cato Major. He was a coarse, vindictive, arrogant, overbearing, self-righteous bully. He was a slave breeder and a slave driver, and married a second wife at eighty. And I am inclined to think that he must have been an old toper besides. Horace says he often warmed up that celebrated virtue of his with wine. "Narratur et prisci Catonis saepe mero caluisse virtus," is his language. Now certainly in an age and country when total abstinence was practically unknown, Cato's indulgence in wine must have been more than merely the common use to have been deemed worthy of note by Horace a century and a half afterward. Cato may have found that elixir of youth in Falernian that Ponce de Leon sought in the springs of Florida. Men aforetime have apparently sought that Fountain of Youth in Jamaica and Geneva, and in France they call brandy Eau-de-Vie.

LAELIUS:

Oh, come, Scipio! You are doing the Censor a great injustice, as you well know. Horace meant by his line that *even* Cato, temperate and austere as he was, *sometimes* drank wine, as I do, and you do, and as Saint Paul advised Saint Timothy to do. "Saepe" means only "once in a while," "not infrequently." But I think we should

be serious in this discussion. If we are, as you suggest, starving sailors on a raft, we are not fit subjects for jest.

Cato was a great man among great men, and, for all you say, an example of many admirable virtues. And Cicero, who puts into his mouth his own ideas about old age, was a thoughtful and cultivated Roman, the most accomplished scholar of his country, and one of her chief statesmen. If we can't agree with his great moral essay, let us not gibe at and belittle it.

SCIPIO:

Well, well, don't excommunicate me for my poor joke. I won't insist on my point about Cato. Reverence him all you will. After all, it wasn't he who wrote *De Senectute*. He had been dead more than a hundred years. I don't believe that Cicero had any means of knowing what Cato thought of old age anyway. Most probably he detested it. Cicero, cultivated, thoughtful, and all that, as he was, had what in these days we call "a trained legal mind." That is, he was a typical lawyer, devoting his life to gaining ability to make the worse appear the better reason on occasion. He chose to divert his thoughts for a few days from political and personal troubles by using this ability in defending old age. His tractate is a lawyer's piece of sophistical advocacy.

CATO:

Now you are striking at me. Lawyers, even advocates, do *not* spend their lives making the worse appear the better reason, nor in seeking to acquire the ability to do so. They are quite as frequently occupied in defending the better reason and explaining and defending a good cause. I still think Cicero was, in the *De Senectute*. I don't propose to give him up without a fight. I want you to consider some of his arguments on their merits. Take what he says about the freedom in maturity and advancing years, from the temptations, follies and passions belonging to sensual pleasures. It surely is, as he declares, a noble gift of age that it liberates us from the vices of youth.

SCIPIO:

Well, since Laelius will not have it, I shall not venture again on the suggestion that Cato was not altogether above them, but I shall insist that neither are all old men without a love of sensual pleasures, nor are all young men slaves to them.

CATO:

If I may judge by what I saw about me in my college days, I fear that our great colleges are no very severe schools of virtue.

SCIPIO:

I think that is the result of too little discipline and supervision for mere boys. I doubt if you can find any cleaner, finer lot of youths in the world than those at Annapolis and West Point. They will compare very well with the retired officers forty years older, I fancy. And if there are too many black sheep in the colleges, in which there is a great sprinkling of the youthful idle rich, so there are in the fashionable social clubs to which the same class resort in their old age. Don't you know some foul old satyrs, to judge by their daily walk and conversation? I don't think the proportion of the unclean to the clean different in young and old in these days, whatever it was in Cicero's.

But when you come to the innocent pleasures that make life most worth living, old men are debarred from them. Young men can enjoy them. Think of this trip to the Hudson Bay Country that you are planning. Laelius can't go. I can't go. You can. The *verve* of life has gone from us.

CATO:

That northern expedition I still insist would be safe enough for you, Scipio, even if too strenuous for Laelius. But, even if it would not, if at your age you have to forego the out-of-door life to some extent, isn't it true, as I was reading a few weeks ago in an

essay in the *Atlantic Monthly*, that it is a compensation that as men grow older the physical world loses its tyrannical authority over the mind, and the greater, better world of thought and affection takes its place; and that as age cares less and less for the material world and lives more in the intellectual and spiritual, it should not envy youth living bound and confined by things physical?

LAELIUS (*musingly*):

I don't think I quite agree with that, if I understand you aright. I think rather that old men losing the tyranny of overstrenuous enthusiasm and zeal are *more* in sympathy with nature. Humility and serenity should come with age, and when they come, man's soul is nearer nature. Does not Emerson say somewhere that nature seems to say to all enthusiasts and combatants, "Why so hot, my child?"

SCIPIO:

All fanciful rot, saving your presence, both! Old age cares less for nature! says Cato. Old age cares more for nature! says Laelius. The fact is, that as to that there is no difference. It all depends on the temperament of the man. But one fact remains: whether caring more or less for it, an old man can't enjoy it so well, that is flat. Exertion wearies him, cold enfeebles and endan-

gers him, physical privation that but gives zest to out-of-door life in youth makes him ill.

CATO:

But consider another thing. If Cicero could make so good a case for Cato's old age, his enjoyment of society, of husbandry, of business, of letters, how much more ought the modern Senex to get the savor of life! Think of the compensations which advancing age has now which Cato and Cicero knew nothing of. Spectacles alone make old men young, one may say. I read in a newspaper the other day that one firm sells twelve million artificial teeth in a year. If Cato didn't suffer with his teeth in old age, we may be sure that many of his contemporaries did. Even if there are yet old-fashioned country squires in England who scorn umbrellas as effeminate, they make rainy weather more tolerable to most men. Think of automobiles with rubber tires compared to springless carts called chariots! And of steam-heated houses, and electric lights, and newspapers! No old man need suffer ennui now because he cannot campaign or hunt or ride. Travel is easy for him, the world and all its happenings unroll day by day in a panorama before his eyes.

SCIPIO:

Oh, yes! Why don't you include golf

among the pleasures of old age and debit it with that blessing, too. Now, listen! For herein is a moral. The old man tries, at a great expenditure of time and energy and perhaps money, to play golf, and sees the child surpass him. He reads books about it, learns the theory thoroughly, and after he has had years of practice, his son takes the clubs for the first time and in a day or two outplays him. The reason! "Oh 'tis plain," he's told; "you can't expect to overcome the difference in age." "The old man must be content to play for exercise and leave the honors of the game to the young."

In what you have last said, Cato, lurks the miserable sophistry of the whole argument in favor of old age. The things you mention are at best merely alleviations of old age, like surgical appliances for the cripple. Such appliances do not make deformity and mutilation enjoyable things.

Your arguments are as idle as Cicero's. I think, indeed, they are idler, for all the material advances you speak of must increase the natural feeling of sorrow and regret that comes over a man when he feels that he is growing old. The things which, were he young again he might play a living part in, have multiplied many times since Cicero's time. But age is still as great an obstacle to his effective action in them as it was to the fewer interests of the Roman's time.

CATO:

Well, at least you must admit that Cicero has made good his argument when he speaks of the honor, deference, and respect paid to old age. You remember that he makes Cato declare the pleasures of youth are as nothing to the deference and authority which a wise old age commands. It has always seemed to me that the outward marks of that deference must bring the very sweetest happiness that life can offer. My father, who was a student in Brown University when Lincoln was assassinated, has told me of a striking example of this honor to the wisdom of old age. Dr. Wayland, the former President of the University, was living then in retirement at an advanced age, in Providence. Spontaneously, apparently, no one knowing from whom the suggestion came, the citizens of Providence on that day of gloom and stress formed a vast procession and marched to Dr. Wayland's house, and heard from that venerable man strong words of comfort and cheer, bidding them not despair of the Republic. Dr. Wayland, even in the sorrow of that hour, must have felt a glow of happiness and pride that this deference to his position, his wisdom, his experience, and his character were shown—a pleasure that young men cannot know.

SCIPIO:

There you go again, just as illogically as

before. *Post hoc, propter hoc.* Because Dr. Wayland was old, you think that his wisdom and force of character, to which and not to his age men paid deference, was the result of his being old. It was no such thing. Dr. Wayland had made before the eyes of the people of Providence an insignificant school into a great one. He was forceful, able, even great, in his comparative youth and in his middle age. Lesser men turned to him *then* for leadership, as they did when he was old. If there was more unanimity in their deference when he was old, it was because the hostile forces which every man worth his salt evokes, when he tries to make any reform of old things or to do any new good thing, had subsided. They *feared* him no longer, because he was old. That sort of deference no true man cares for. It is no compensation for the "certaminis ardor" which has been lost.

But whatever deference may have been paid to old age as such in the time of Cicero or of Dr. Wayland, it is obsolete now. I doubt very much whether at those times, or in any other indeed, it was much more than affectation to pretend that it was to age rather than to the wealth or power which some old men possessed, that the deference was paid. But let that pass. The modern spirit has reversed the conditions, if they existed. Cabot Lodge, in his recent book,

says the process has placed him and his contemporaries in a subordinate position at both ends of life, first to their parents and now to their children. But I am not finding fault with the modern spirit. I do object though to the assumption made by you and made by Cicero that old age as such brings deference and still more to the assumption that such deference brings satisfaction and happiness. Successful effort is the only key to happiness, and, speaking in general way, old age paralyzes effort. It does not do it in all cases and seldom altogether in one case. Instances here and there of energetic and successful effort by old men you can cite of course. You need not give yourself the trouble. I know, for instance, that Gladstone was a whirlwind of energy as an old man, but he was a freak, not the natural man. His hatter had annually to increase the size of his hats until he was over seventy. But as a rule the energy which moves the world in the right direction is that of young men, and correspondingly and naturally the only deference and respect worth having or that can bring satisfaction and happiness to the recipient go to them.

CATO:

It is you who are sophistical, but I shall not stop to point out the flaw in your logic. But think of what great things old men have

done in the world's history and how that contradicts your talk about old age paralyzing effort. Cicero names many great names among the ancients. Among the moderns the instances are too numerous to cite. You need not have excused me from doing so. I know very well you could not forget them. Great poets, great philosophers, great scientists, great statesmen, great judges, great soldiers even, have, long after men called them old, accomplished the best work of their lives.

SCIPIO:

Yes, I know; I told you I admitted it. Longfellow in some rather unmelodious lines has made a catalogue of some of them, but he is obliged to add, "these are indeed exceptions," and that they only show how far, "the gulf stream of our youth may flow into arctic regions of our lives, where little else than life itself survives." A far better test of the real fact as a general proposition is furnished by the insistence on young men when employers need efficient help. It is next to impossible for a man over forty thrown out of employment to find it again. Nor does it follow that all the actions or works for which the aged have been celebrated were *excellently* done. The historians and other romance writers of the world have agreed to exploit the occasional spurts of

intellectual or physical energy and ability on the part of old men on the same principle that Dr. Johnson praised the literary work of his female friend. The thing worthy of note was not that she had done it well or ill but that she had done it at all. The actress Galeria appeared on the stage in Augustus' time when one hundred and four years old and the people went wild. But I don't suppose that her decrepitude was really any pleasanter to look at than that of the slightly less elderly ballet dancers of the present day.

Judges are favorite examples for the panegyrists of old age to cite. We are assured, mostly on the authority of the judges themselves, that a judge is at his best somewhere between seventy and eighty. The recently retired Lord Chief Justice of England said so the other day. But I notice that those excellent representatives of public opinion, the newspapers, give credit to old judges for little capacity except that of being able to hang on to the woolsack, and that when a judge is to be appointed, the appointing power bars men over sixty, whatever their experience. Quite right, too, it is, in my opinion. The real fact is, old men are but broken reeds to depend on anywhere.

LAELIUS:

Scipio shows he is not really old by the very intolerance of his feeling. He may com-

fort himself by that. He certainly hasn't acquired the mellowness of age. Old age comes to different people at a different length of years. He evidently hasn't arrived at his.

CATO:

I do not accept your reasoning, Scipio. Of course I can't deny that physical energy, which is often a very desirable thing both in public office and in private employment, is more likely to be wanting in the old than in the young, nor can I deny that in many conditions and circumstances of life old age brings misery and wretchedness with it, through increasing difficulty in earning one's living. But all that is principally, as I believe, through a bad social and economic organization. It is too big a subject to go into now. The condition you allude to depends on a thousand different things. National customs, religious customs, social customs, political theories, economic habits, business organization, all affect it. It is beside the question which we have raised here. We are discussing, or I thought we were, whether outside of these economic and business considerations more advanced years of life are as a whole as likely to be as enjoyable and worth living as the earlier ones, to average men, like ourselves and our fellow members in this club, say. Following Cicero,

I say they are. You say men are less effective or efficient when old. But even if they are less men of action, and often they are not, they certainly, I believe, are as a rule wiser and more virtuous. And Cicero says that. He makes the Censor say that really great things are accomplished not by physical force or rapidity of action but by good judgment, wisdom and influence, all of which are the results of experience. In age, *they* are not lessened but increased, and even if what Cicero makes Cato say was not true, that great affairs are best managed by those no longer young, it would still be true that old men are wiser than young ones, and that their power of judgment and their influence in all things are increased. Therefore the confidence of their fellow-men in their resources grows stronger, too. This is another thing from the deference and respect which we were talking of, and it must be, as Cicero says it is, a very great source of happiness to the old man, if he recognizes his own good. He must feel that he has grown in wisdom and if in wisdom then in those virtues which are wisdom's children, and his real happiness must correspondingly increase, it seems to me. You can hardly deny that, Scipio.

SCIPIO:

I not only can, but I do.

The wisdom you speak of doesn't exist in old men, unless it existed in them when young. This is what you lawyers call an admission against interest in my case and therefore the more valuable and the more likely to be true. I should like to think that as I am growing old I am growing wiser, but I am not so conceited about it as most of my contemporaries. A man is wise in the true sense when he is old, only if he was wise when he was young. He is foolish and stupid when he is old, if he was so when he was young. But there is a great difference in the proportion in which the good and bad qualities of a man survive. Except as to those passions springing from the hot blood of youth, concerning which it has been said: "We flatter ourselves we are taking leave of our vices when in fact our vices are taking leave of us," a man's faults of character tend to increase and strengthen with his age, while his excellencies and strong qualities tend to weaken and disappear. You talk of wisdom as the result of experience. It is no such thing. I don't know what *your* view of English politics may be, but there *are* men, both old and young, who think that Gladstone was as wise when at thirty-two he was the rising hope of the stern and unbending Tories, but saw that the Corn Laws must be repealed, as when he broke up the Liberal party of

England by insisting on an immediate dismemberment of the Empire. Or, if you take the other political view, I may say that there are men, both young and old, who think that John Bright was as wise when he led the Free Trade and the Working Men's Enfranchisement movements as when he broke with Gladstone on the Home Rule Bill, opposed Woman's Suffrage and told the first president of this club that he could go no further in agrarian reform nor seek to liberalize further the land tenure laws of Great Britain. These men may have been wise at each period. I do not say they were not. They were certainly able. But they carried out of life what they brought into it, inherited ability, and an intellectual capacity which took advantage of education and environment. Of course, men must have opportunity to show their powers and *that* sometimes comes early and sometimes late in life. But it is their native ability and not their so-called experience which counts. All history shows it. Robert Louis Stevenson makes good fun of the idea that so-called teachings of experience make a man wise. He says, "A man finds he has been wrong at every preceding stage of his career only to deduce the astonishing conclusion that he is at last entirely right." But many of the good qualities of a man, and wisdom and the capacity to judge really

well in cases of emergency are among them, fail and weaken as the man grows old. If his experience is greater, his memory is worse. Cicero makes Cato say that old men forget only what they are no longer interested in, that no old man forgets where he deposited his money or who owes him debts. But if we admit that, it only means that things that ought to interest him, things that urge to great deeds and heroic actions have ceased to interest him, while avarice remains strong. Men from being gallant reformers turn selfish reactionaries, their courage oozes out of their finger tips and they become cowardly; they *were* generous, they *are* niggardly; they *were* confiding, they have grown suspicious of other men's motives. That which you call knowledge and wisdom derived from experience, but which I should rather term physical, mental and moral degeneracy, makes them set their faces against the heroic, which seems to them the irrational.

To quote Stevenson again, "What elderly father holds up Joan of Arc as an example to his daughters or Columbus to his sons?" The world goes on and great deeds are done in spite of old men, not by their aid. And even Cicero can find nothing to say to the charge that very many old men are morose, or peevish, querulous, irritable, and fault-finding, as well as avaricious, except that not

all old men are so, that these vices belong not to old men as such but only to such old men. Not all wines and not all old men, he says, grow sour by age. Agreed, for although Cicero himself confessed to this fault, here is our friend Laelius and many others in our club who are good proofs that all old men do not have it, but isn't it an indictment of old age generally, and not a defence of it, that Cicero makes in putting the argument thus? As for avarice, everybody acknowledges that *it* increases with age. If a man ever gets the magpie passion for accumulation it grows with his years and dies only with his life. And yet you talk of the wisdom of old men! Cicero himself says, if I remember his argument aright, after admitting avarice to be a common vice of old men, that nothing could be conceived more foolish than to heap up the more provisions the shorter the rest of the journey.

I don't wish to offend you, Cato, but I believe it is all an affectation for people to pretend they think old age is marked by wisdom. That men in general have never even thought so, or indeed reckoned with men in classes as young and old, is shown by the want of any agreement as to when a man begins to be properly considered old. All sorts of ages have been suggested, from twenty-five to eighty-five. Every man is really considered old or young separately

and individually, and ought to be. No man knows, himself, unless he breaks down under some sudden misfortune, when he began to be old. Almost every man with a cheerful and stupid optimism, hopes to escape old age for himself and to be always young in feeling and powers. He knows his contemporaries are of his age, but he rarely thinks of himself as of theirs. You know Cicero says, and I am proving to you that I know my *De Senectute* as well as you who overrate it, "Sensim sine sensu aetas senescit." But there are certain signs other than physical failings or defects that we can't blink out of sight that remind us feelingly as we grow out of middle-age what we have become. And they are not proofs of the advantages of age at all. We cease to be adaptable to new surroundings and environments. We lose the desire for change and adventure, which is equivalent to losing love for the best in life. We lose in quickness of apprehension. We give foolish and oftentimes offensive advice. We do not think so highly of our fellow-men. We never expect punctuality. We shrink from beginning a new work. We are petulant in comment, and aggressive in argument, and yet young men, instead of hotly contradicting us as they used to do, are silent, or, if they do contradict, substitute for a heat that recognized equality a certain sneering,

arrogant superciliousness which seems to say: "Old dotard. Why break in?"

And once it is recognized, old age joins hands with us and becomes an undesired, unloved, and unlovely companion. Not all the sophistical arguments in the world, classical and modern combined, can change that condition.

CATO:

You can't be old, Scipio, according to one of your own tests. You have found one young man ready to contradict you with heat and still disposed to do so. Literature, in my opinion in all ages, has been too much given to overvaluing youth and underrating age. It has catered to youth in song and in poetry, in plays and in romances. The dignity, wisdom, and graciousness of old age have been neglected as compared with the buoyancy of youth and it has forgotten that youth is not only buoyant but is apt to be conceited, ill advised, narrow, fanatical and intolerant. Think back as far even as the plays of Euripides. Can you conceive anything more unfair than the bitter reproaches of Admetus to Pheres in the Alkestis because Pheres was not eager to give up his life for him? And all imaginative literature since is permeated more or less with the same absurdity. Maeterlinck almost seems to think the bees are the superiors of men be-

cause they voluntarily give up the full hive and all the results of their labors each year to a lot of embryos. Shakespeare makes all his happy people young. Prospero is something of an exception perhaps. I don't recall any other. Falstaff, although the cause of joy to others, can hardly be supposed to have really enjoyed his own utter selfishness and demoralization. It is from the false view of youth and age thus spread like an infection with but few remedies or antidotes supplied, that the opinion that you express of the disadvantages of age springs. Stateliness and large-mindedness belong properly to age, not to youth, and if an old man has good health and all his faculties, and is able to work moderately, either intellectually or physically, he ought to be happy. The truth and soberness that come with age are worth all they cost. An old man who isn't frivolous, nor pompous, nor garrulous, is the most delightful of companions.

SCIPIO:

Yes; a vehement Know-nothing once admitted to me that an Irish gentleman was the most perfect of gentlemen,—"if you could only meet one," he added! It is strange if, as you say, poets and men of genius and insight have been endeavoring to mislead us about the relative advantages of youth and age for thousands of years,

that the race has not found it out, but still continues obstinately to prefer youth. But the truth is that if the writers have generally been on that side it has been unconsciously, and because they were expressing an insistent truth which couldn't be hidden. The *labored* arguments have been, like Cicero's, on the other side. *Old* men have written in praise of old age, it seems to me, because *they* do not want to cry "Stinking fish." *Your* unnatural praise of it I couldn't understand as well as I do theirs, except that being young you really know little about it and don't realize what it really is, and besides are, like Cicero, exercising that "trained legal mind" of yours. But neither they nor you can convince me. About old age I feel as Sir Godfrey Kneller and Lord Houghton did about death. When Pope told Kneller that God would take him to Heaven, Sir Godfrey said, "I wish he would let me stay at Twickenham." When they told Lord Houghton that he was to join the majority, he said, "You know I always preferred the minority."

But you and I, Cato, are getting nowhere with this discussion. What have you to say, Laelius? You have been almost as silent as your namesake that Cicero made listen so admiringly to the Censor's eloquence. You are neither a lawyer nor a young man. Tell us what you think about the matter in hand.

LAELIUS:

Well, Scipio, I am inclined to think it *is* up to me to say something. I have been listening rather attentively and I haven't heard anything particularly enlightening from either of you. I hope you will pardon my frankness but I am going to play the part of the "Candid Friend" to both of you. Cato's arguments, as you hinted, Scipio, sound a little insincere and forced, a little too much like what you call Cicero's, an advocate's plea. Besides, he is doing an unnatural thing after all, trying to project himself into a period of life of which he has no experience and insisting that he will enjoy a mental and physical condition which he can only know in imagination. As for you, Scipio, you are unfair to the compensations and consolations of old age because you are like a mountain climber who is just passing through the clouds. You may yet find clear sunlight above, or moonlight at least. I don't know that you will. We none of us can tell what the future has for us, but it is not certain to be stormy or gloomy at the top as you seem to argue. I don't think you are any more in real, deadly earnest in your diatribes against old age than Cato was in his praises of it. I fancy that your whole view of it is really tinctured by something you have barely mentioned, that the proximity of death is a certainty to an old man

and merely a possibility to a young one. Is it not so?

SCIPIO:

I will admit it for the sake of the argument, for I would like to know what you can say to remove that gruesome shadow from my mind. Certainly it is true that it is not a pleasant thought to me, when I do think of it, that I am soon to shut my eyes to all the interesting and beautiful things the world contains and to lose knowledge of all the advances that men will make in the future towards a higher and fuller development of life. But it is my experience that death is a subject not widely thought of, and it is very well that it is so, or we should be under a continual depression of spirits, we, that is, like myself and I think Cato here, who do not profess to have any definite knowledge or hope of a future life.

LAELIUS:

Your agnosticism, if you are an agnostic, should prevent your being certain that you *are* to be deprived of the knowledge of earthly affairs, when your physical life in this world ends. You do not know that your knowledge, and your interest even, in what goes on in the next century may not be wider and more satisfactory than you have had in what went on in the last and in this.

CATO:

Pardon me for interrupting, Laelius, but I fear that I cannot claim the hope of that possibility even. Scipio is, I think, a professed agnostic, but for myself, although I have tried, in obedience to those whom I respect and love, to constrain my mind to a hope at least of personal identity after physical death, I cannot. I suppose I must be called a materialist, pure and simple. But I do not fear death and yet death is as possible to me to-night as to either of you. Cicero is right about that. Really few men live to a very advanced age and the greater number die young. When you are comparing the possible happiness of old age with that of youth, I think you should not reckon with death, which is common in and to both.

And I agree with what Cicero makes Cato say in the alternative, that annihilation is but a final rest. Death is the sea to which the river of every life must flow, be its course long or short. It is not to be either desired nor feared, but simply accepted, and as it may come at any age, we should compare the relative advantages of times of life with each other without reference to it.

LAELIUS:

The fallacy of your argument and of Cicero's about this I have suggested just now, and I am going to return to it, for to

talk of old age without discussing the certain approach of death is a greater absurdity than the trite illustration of playing Hamlet with Hamlet omitted. To praise old age as a happy time of life without taking account of that which is immediately impending on the old man, the shadow of which he cannot throw off, seems as inconsistent to me as the position of an acquaintance of mine who pressed on me once the statement that he found very great comfort in that he was thoroughly and enthusiastically a Catholic, believing all the doctrines of the Church, except that of the divinity of Christ. But first I will try to take you on your own ground and consider the compensations of old age as against its disadvantages without considering the hope or the fear of what is to follow. I agree with Scipio about the disadvantages of old age in *external* things. Old age makes known its approach by signs which are never pleasant to a normal man. His natural force begins to decline, his figure is bent, his feet take not so kindly, we will not say to mountain climbing, but even to easy grades; he is very fortunate if even in the sixties sight and hearing are quite as acute as in the forties. Tendencies to pains and disabilities bring with them a sense of general discomfort. These are all matters of course and to say they must be resisted, as Cicero does, means

nothing but that a man must be courageous in meeting these evils, not that they are less evils or can be avoided. Nor is it to the purpose in our discussion that there were alleviations of these evils in Cicero's time and many more now, as our young friend points out. We are comparing times of life and most of the things at least that our Cato names as well as all those, so far as I remember, that his namesake of old mentioned, are as useful in making youth physically more comfortable as they are in rendering old age less burdensome.

I don't think very much either of the argument that both Catos so insist on, that the deference shown to old men should reconcile them to their privations and incapacities. Scipio doesn't think that old age as such commands deference now. I am doubtful about that. I rather think it does, deference of a certain kind, but it is the deference that one pays to weakness rather than to strength and power. Healthy old men don't like it. I think that Scipio's bitterness has been increased by the persistence with which people insist on helping him on with his overcoat. Deference and external marks of respect from others it is human to enjoy, and most of us are not above feeling that enjoyment to some degree. But after all they are of small account to a manly man as compared with the approval and respect of his own

consciousness. Men enjoy them more or less according to their temperaments, but in any case, they are only enjoyable when they are the outward signs that the recipient has the power and influence that ambitious men covet. Deference to age as such may be a good sign in youth who pay it. I pass no opinion on that. But it is only dotage in the recipient that can set much value on it. So far as it takes the form which Scipio has suggested of indifference or concealment of opposition to an old man's opinions and advice, it is always irritating, albeit again, of course, in degrees varying with the temperament of the man. But all strong men dislike anything which suggests that the time has come when they are to be crowded out of the busiest and most active affairs of life by the generation they have known as boys and fledglings. It is not only hard to realize that your sons are old enough to take to themselves wives and rear and educate families according to their ideas and not yours, but it is also with a distinct sense of losing hold and grip on that part of the world's affairs nearest and dearest to you that you *do* realize it in most cases, I think. Weakest of all the arguments which the panegyrists of old age have ever used, it seems to me, is that it is the time when friends are found in troops, as Shakespeare says. Exactly the reverse must be the lot of every old man.

Some old friends he may have had the happiness to retain and he may have made many new ones, but the new ones in the nature of things can not be like the friends of his youth and middle age who, as he gets on in years, drop around him like the autumn leaves. He cannot but feel a sense of isolation and bereavement. I hardly ever take up a newspaper now without learning of the death of some acquaintance; very frequently it is of some much loved friend. As to John Bright during the Crimean War, so to me, the Angel of Death seems very near! "I almost hear the beating of his wings!" An old man must have been fortunate beyond most, if it has not entered into his own family and left him not only bereaved but also desolate. For sorrows like these I think old age has no corresponding external joys or advantages. Alleviations it may have, in that feelings are less intense and griefs therefore more tolerable, and to some of us, in the hope which Cicero's Cato had and which we more abundantly possess, that we shall soon meet and recognize our own again in a future life. But these things are but mitigations, by no means compensations. For compensations, if they exist, as I think they do, we must turn away from things external and look within ourselves.

"The gift of years" is in things of the spirit. It is the mellowing and ripening of

life. You may sneer at the idea, Scipio, now. I believe that you will yet come to see, if you will only accept it, that there *is* a wisdom which comes with old age, a better sense of proportion, than the hot-headedness of youth or the midsummer madness of middle age has. For brightness of the eyes it gives a deeper knowledge of the heart; for gaiety and gladness, an understanding sympathy. We see and understand what young, eager eyes have missed. The counsels of the old are merciful. Phryne was acquitted on the judgment of old men. *Tout comprendre est tout pardonner.* We are so constituted intellectually and spiritually that *liberty* makes for our happiness, and advanced years mean, for our minds and souls, freedom, emancipation in many different ways. I am not alluding to that which the two Catos have made so much of, freedom from the passions of youth. "With a lingering doubt," as Judge Holmes of the United States Supreme Court says when reluctantly agreeing with his colleagues, I will assent to Scipio's opinion about that. But I mean emancipation from narrow and intolerant enthusiasms, from fanatic partisanships, from opinions which, because of environment and fostered prejudices, had almost become obsessions. One sees life clearly and sees it whole. We gain the intellectual power to weigh and measure and

make allowances. We come really to believe and not merely conventionally to admit, that sincere people may differ on radical points, that so many and subtle are the influences which play on the intellect that vagaries in the others should awaken less reprobation and more sympathy. The old man sympathizes with both saint and sinner. Life seems less tragic to him than to the young because it is less intense. He knows that all sorrows will subside, that the disappointed lover will find some other girl, and the defeated candidate another activity. The reformer becomes less "a malignant reformer," to use Carlyle's phrase; the conservative, less a reactionary.

SCIPIO:

You haven't had your share of this discussion and we haven't much more time for it. I don't like to interrupt you. But so that you shall not think I am deferring to your age too much, let me put in a caveat. Your theory of the change that comes with age is not sound. If it were, I would grant the compensation. But you are as bad as Cicero himself. He tried to make poor, disappointed, ill, frail people satisfied with old age, because Cato, rich, elevated in position, strong and well, found it tolerable. You picture your state of mind, now that you are old, as that of the average Senex.

It is no such thing. The old man is likely to be more partisan, more bigoted, more narrow, and more generally crabbed and intolerant than either the middle aged man or the youth.

LAELIUS:

Well! I don't agree with you. My experience with my contemporaries makes me believe what I have told you. Of course my generalization doesn't include all old men. As Cicero says, the happiness of one's old age must depend after all largely on how his youth is disciplined. If one has a sullen and peevish temper when young, and it is not checked and corrected, it may grow into moroseness. But taking men in the mass, it seems to me that in overcoming the difficulties of life in youth and middle age, meeting trials and bearing burdens, learning of other men and conditions, adjusting themselves to changes and chances, they correct the faults of which we are speaking, grow more humane and kindly, take cares more lightly, are more patient and more just. It is true that men who have lived long and experienced much and have seen the outcome of many social and political changes that have not fulfilled the hopes of those who have been zealous in bringing them about, are apt to be less credulous and enthusiastic about further untried expedients proposed. And

yet on the other hand they may and frequently are, from their experience and from their knowledge that changes feared by many in their inception have had results altogether good, quicker than young men to recognize the good in new social or intellectual movements. Toryism is a vice of constitution or of circumstance as common and as fixed at forty as at seventy.

SCIPIO:

You are merely saying that the state of mind in its outlook of the world, which should according to your ideas make old age a tolerable and even a pleasant time of life, is a matter of individual temperament. Doubtless the individual characteristics of a man determine whether *his* will be a cheerful old age. This is the nearest approach to an admission of any force in your argument that you will get from me. But what has that to do with a comparison of the relative advantages of times of life? The individual temperament of the youth determines whether his youth is happy, too. One man may be fairly comfortable all through life and another generally miserable, each because of his inherited or acquired disposition. It doesn't advance the argument between youth and age to point that out.

LAELIUS:

Well, I didn't expect to convert you and

I don't feel disputatious. Let me go on. I think old age has compensations, as I told you, not advantages. I think that Senex, to speak of him impersonally, is not only likely to be emancipated in mind from the passions of youth and from its too fierce enthusiasms, intensities and intolerances in relation to others, but as is even more to the purpose so far as his own happiness is concerned, emancipated from motives personal to himself which must always have been enemies of his tranquility and serenity. Cicero makes Cato speak of death as the harbor after a long voyage. It is a very common figure. Stevenson suggested for his own epitaph,—

> "Home is the sailor, home from sea,
> And the hunter home from the hill!"

But I am thinking of the old man as already in harbor, not merely as approaching it. In every life there have been dangers of ruin, physical, mental, or moral, to face, decisions to make on which one's whole future rested, enterprises to undertake or shun from a sense of duty to one's family. Sometimes in youth on the turn of a die seemed to hang controlling results to a life that stretched before you to make or mar. In middle life perhaps even more than in youth comes grave responsibility for these decisions. In old age for better or for worse the dice are

down. One may turn to his daily duty or his daily routine with the knowledge that it is inevitable, that the time for nervously considering what the future will bring, if this, that, or the other course is adopted, is past, that the future for him in this work-a-day world is not long anyway, that his children are living their own lives independently of him, that his responsibility is over, and his burden thrown down. At least, he can reflect, he is less likely to make a terrific fool of himself. Some men even in this sunset of life have a still deeper comfort afforded them. By the very progress of events, they have seen their decisions and actions which were unjustly criticized as selfish, perverse or foolish, justified as wise and beneficent, and have gained honor and respect for the things for which they had been blamed. Is there not in all this compensation for diminished physical strength or for even diminished mental energy? For the glow of contending effort, age has the calmer joys of repose, and the remembrances of races run, goals reached and prizes won.

SCIPIO:

I despair of your logic, Laelius, as much as I do of Cato's. What you say is not true or is true only to a very limited extent. It seems to me like that which you said before to be only the reflection of the mind of *one* old

man, exceptionally comfortable in circumstances, not rich, I suppose, as men count riches now-a-days, but without personal danger of want for himself or his household, with children successful and well behaved, with a taste for reading and study and for those arts and pursuits which bring sweetness and light into men's lives. *He* may live a short remainder of his life very comfortably after the sense of responsibility of which you speak is gone. But the world, I insist, is not made up of such people. To say nothing of the toiling millions who live at every age from hand to mouth, think only of the people somewhat of our own condition in life, of old men who cannot get out of business without ruin, of men in public office,—judges, we will say,—who look to recurring nominations and elections. Are they free from anxieties? And don't those anxieties oppress them all the more as they grow older? But if it were true that old age generally threw down troublesome, nerve-racking responsibility, I doubt very much the happiness to be gained from that. It merely substitutes one mental distress for another. You no longer perhaps have to make important decisions but you fret because your decisions neither are, nor are considered, of importance, that although man was born for action, *your* time for action is past, that the tide of the world's

affairs has swept by you and left you stranded. And as for retrospect, who has been successful according to the dreams of his youth? Very few. The old man recalls two failures to every success, perhaps no success worth recollection. I fear that with most men the hope of tranquility and serenity in old age is a mirage.

CATO (*who has been listening thoughtfully, breaks in as Laelius is about to speak*):

I wonder, Scipio, if we are not all wrong and all right. Isn't it after all almost altogether his individual temperament that makes a man at any age cheerful or discontented, tranquil or excitable, happy or miserable? We shall I fear never come to an absolute agreement.

But I would like to hear what Laelius has to say about the approach of death to old men. He spoke of it as a shadow he could not throw off. I do not think I shrink from death. I cannot share in his belief in a future life, that is, at least in preservation of personal identity in a life after this, or even in Cicero's hope of it so beautifully set forth in the *De Senectute;* but surely the argument is good that death is common to all ages, that at the worst it is but rest, that is a part of nature as life itself is, that it is even less to be dreaded by old men than by the young because they have already fully filled their

place in the great scheme of things, and have had the long life desired by normal men in accordance with the will to live, a will implanted in them by nature as the very condition of living at all.

LAELIUS:

I will not say "no" to that, Cato. I am so far removed, however, in my own thought from your standpoint that I am afraid that I am not a fit judge of such an argument. Belief in our personal identity in a future life and in happiness in that life, if we have lived this one well, is so much a part of the very web and woof of my thoughts about death that I cannot so escape its influence as to realize to myself how I should feel if I did not have it. It *seems* to me, though, that I should not fear death more. *Life* would be much less pleasant to me. It would be a sad thing. Its disappointments, its burdens and its trials, common to believer and to unbeliever, would remain, and in addition all its associations, intimacies and family ties would have in them an element of sorrow from their very inception. I could never escape the haunting thought that the high pleasures of love and friendship were all to have a sudden and final end. I would rather, I should be constantly saying to myself, go first than to be left in grief and loneliness. And I should not fear death

so much because I should fear bereavement more. And yet I do not know! Annihilation is no pleasant thought either. The idea of closing my eyes with the thought that they are never to open in a conscious life hear-after, that nothing more either on the earth or in the universe at large, either in the world of flesh or in the world of spirit, is to be known to me, is something from which I have a great and instinctive shrinking. You say you have not, Cato. Scipio confesses that to him, the thought of death is a darkening shadow on his advancing years. I suppose this, too, is a matter of individual temperament, but Scipio's seems to me the more natural feeling, if one does not and cannot believe in a conscious and happy future. For whatever may be the value of the rest of Cicero's argument or of yours, Cato, from this standpoint, there is no validity in the position you both take that because death may come to youth, as well as to age, the dread of it cannot reasonably be more felt by age. There is a great difference between possibility and certainty. Youth *may* have its undertakings cut short, its work and interests suddenly ended. Old age, if it is either mentally or physically active, is *sure* to have. I think, Cato, knowledge that you were certainly to be shot within sixty days would affect you differently from your knowledge that you can't live

more than seventy years more and may die at any time. Cicero's argument is very weak in this regard, of a piece with his preposterous sophism that men should not dislike old age because they have wished to attain it, as though long life, which they have desired, was the same thing as its necessary condition, old age, which they certainly have *not* prayed for, and with his astounding statement that young men fall sick more easily than old men, suffer more from their illnesses, and are cured with more difficulty.

It is doubtless true, however, as I believe, that old men who do dread death, dread it less than they would have done in youth had it been as certainly imminent then, for nature seems to prepare us all for the great change by lessening the intensity of our feeling concerning it. I remember through more than sixty years the overpowering awe and fear that the thought of death brought with it to me when a boy. My feelings now should be clearer and stronger than then, but I can no longer feel as deeply about it.

SCIPIO:

Yes, loss of power of imagination and feeling is one of the things that make old age hateful to me. Gilbert Murray says that the poet, philosopher, or martyr who lives inarticulate within most human beings

is usually smothered or starved to death in the course of middle life.

LAELIUS:

I suppose imagination *has* weakened in me, but it is much more than that which has robbed death of its great terror for me. I think on a lower plane the idea has become more tolerable to me as an old man because, interested though I am in all that goes on around, I see as every old man must, surging over us, new times, new movements, a new spirit, in all the interests of life. I can take no serious part in them. They must be forwarded or checked by another generation than mine. Why should I stay to fret and, as Cicero says, grow more bitter every day? But on a higher plane, I fear death less. I even, in a way, can welcome it as a friend when it comes, for the reasons that Cicero in the finest and noblest part of his essay puts forward as the Censor's. I believe with him that our world is but a place of sojourn, not an abiding home. I am in no haste to go. Yet with the greater assurance that revelation, as I believe, has given to the intuitions of the soul, I can look forward to reunion with my friends who have gone before and bring myself with sincerity to join in Cato's exultant cry:

"Oh! glorious day, when I shall leave behind me the turmoil of earth and depart for that divine council and assembly of souls!"

Meanwhile I will not fret at age, but trust in a God who does all things justly and well, and, with Cardinal Newman, pray:

"May He support us all the day long till the shades lengthen, and the evening comes, and the busy world is hushed, and the fever of life is over, and our work is done!"

CATO (*after a prolonged silence, sotto voce, and as to himself*):

It *is* all a matter of individual temperament!

SCIPIO (*looking at his watch*):

Well, at least, *Dum vivimus, vivamus.* It is half-past six. Our friends in the south parlor down stairs are waiting for us.

(*They go out and the room is left empty.*)

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